

A High School That Turned Around

St. Benedict's is a Catholic urban school, located in downtown Newark, New Jersey, that serves poor black and Hispanic teenage boys. It produces exceptional results, breaking for many of its students the vicious cycle of poverty into which they were born. Its graduates go on to become teachers, businesspersons, lawyers, engineers, and doctors.

It was not always so. Twenty years ago St. Benedict's was on the verge of closing. Enrollment was declining, student achievement low. St. Benedict's achieved this turn-around through high moral and academic expectations.

1. The school insists on good manners and restrained behavior. Noise, bad language, and rowdiness are not tolerated. The halls are safe and free of graffiti.
2. High standards of discipline and responsibility are reinforced in the classroom.
3. Students are taught how to take notes and use their notebooks in all classes.
4. Strenuous athletic and extracurricular activity is also encouraged.
5. There is a strong system of peer support. Each incoming freshman is assigned an older student as a mentor to help the new student learn the school's code of conduct and master the academic curriculum.

St. Benedict's now has a waiting list, with many students from the suburbs seeking admission. Its program has been featured in Education Week.